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**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

September 20, 2017

The Honorable Donald J. Trump  
President of the United States  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

There is a historic Category 4 hurricane slamming into Puerto Rico and the millions of U.S. citizens living there. As the Island faces hurricane force winds not seen in modern times, I ask that you declare a major disaster in Puerto Rico as soon as the statute allows and direct FEMA to aggressively marshal and coordinate all federal resources available to Island as quickly as humanly possible.

Puerto Rico is particularly vulnerable. Hurricane Maria is barreling over Puerto Rico two weeks after it was hit by Hurricane Irma which caused over \$1 billion in damage. Puerto Ricans have already been reeling from power outages, lack of potable water and a shortage of basic resources. Obviously, the first order of business is search and rescue, saving lives, reopening airports and seaports for critical supplies and to ensure that the Puerto Rican people have shelter, clean water and food.

In addition, the dire needs facing Puerto Ricans in the coming days and weeks cannot be overstated. The Island has suffered for more than 10 years under a recession and is in the midst of a severe financial crisis, crushing debt, high unemployment and unprecedented out-migration. The fiscal control board imposed on Puerto Rico by the U.S. Congress has already slashed the public budget, imposed extreme austerity measures and is powerless to invest in the economy, create jobs and promote growth. This means that Puerto Rico is broke and absolutely unable to financially contribute to its own recovery. Given this, I ask you to ensure that any cost sharing requirements that would normally be imposed on a state or territory under less dire circumstances be waived, as you are allowed to do under law.

I also urge you to call on your Secretary of Health and Human Services to declare a Public Health Emergency for Puerto Rico. Due to high rates of poverty and aging infrastructure, the risk of disease in Puerto Rico will grow swiftly and exponentially. The danger of contracting mosquito borne diseases like the Zika virus will likely increase and clean water and healthy food will be in short supply. In addition, sixty percent of Puerto Ricans depend on Medicaid and Medicare, healthcare programs that are severely underfunded by our federal government and that is impeded even more by a lack of doctors and qualified healthcare providers on the Island.

In addition, given that record numbers of individuals have fled the Island in recent years in search of better opportunities on the United States mainland, the population of Puerto Rico has a much higher percentage of elderly than on the mainland. Roughly 20% of the island's population is over the age of 60, bringing considerable concerns and risks for this vulnerable demographic in the wake of a natural disaster. Poverty, limited mobility, limited access to healthcare and the collapse of infrastructure like potable water and the electrical system will place the elderly at severe risk of disease, injury and death.

Of course, it is essential to plan FEMA's and the federal government's response cognizant of the fact that the primary language on the island is Spanish and very few Puerto Ricans speak English. The Island's government and news media are all conducted in Spanish, so it is imperative that emergency communications and information about rescue, relief and long term assistance for individuals, businesses and rebuilding is all provided in Spanish. As FEMA, the Coast Guard, and other entities send first responders and recruit volunteers to help in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, please ensure that there is a special and concerted effort to recruit those who speak Spanish, including translators to facilitate communication among those who respond to the call to assist but do not speak the language.

The call for assistance from our fellow Americans will be complicated further by the fact that Puerto Rico is an island, with its closest neighbor, Florida, 1000 miles away. While states facing major disasters on the mainland benefit from relatively accessible emergency assistance of neighboring states, Puerto Rico's location offers no such access. The call for emergency assistance must be aggressive, broad and throughout the United States, with a particular focus on air and sea resources to more swiftly facilitate the marshalling of desperately needed assistance to the Island.

Thank you in advance for calling on all the federal agencies at your disposal to respond to the major disaster in Puerto Rico with the full battery of resources available to them in the face of the most destructive hurricane to hit the Island in generations. I will do my part in Chicago to rally support and resources from Puerto Ricans and other Americans concerned for the plight of those in Hurricane Maria's path.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Luis V. Gutierrez  
Member of Congress